



H.R. 2608 – SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act

Floor Situation

H.R. 2608 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representatives Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Jerry Weller (R-IL) on June 7, 2007. It was referred to the Committee on Ways and Means but was not marked up. The Ways and Means Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee had a hearing on the topic of SSI assistance for refugees on March 22, 2007.

H.R. 2608 is expected to be considered on the floor on July 11, 2007.

Summary

H.R. 2608:

- Extends the eligibility of certain legal noncitizen refugees, asylees, and Cuban/Haitian entrants to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for an additional two years (for a total of nine years after entry), with the possibility of a third year of benefits (for a total of up to 10 years after entry) if the individual has a still pending application for citizenship. The benefit extensions would be available in fiscal years 2008 through 2010 only.
- Authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to recover unemployment benefit overpayments attributable to fraud by reducing federal income tax refunds for affected individuals.

Background

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a welfare program designed to assist low-income individuals who are disabled, blind, or 65 or older. The benefits were provided to more than 7 million people in 2006, with an average benefit of approximately \$450 per person per month.

Congress barred most non-U.S. citizens from receiving SSI benefits as a part of the welfare reforms passed in 1996. An exemption was created for legal refugees, asylees, and related categories; this exemption currently allows the payment of SSI benefits to these legal refugees and related categories during their first seven years in the U.S.

This exemption was designed to provide sufficient time for those who seek to become citizens to navigate the naturalization process to completion; however, due to delays in processing naturalization applications, many refugees still have a pending application at the end of their seventh year in the U.S. causing a loss of SSI benefits.

This bill would extend SSI benefit eligibility for up to an additional two years (for a total of nine years) for all refugees and asylees, and for up to a total of ten years for those whose citizenship applications remain pending after the end of their ninth year in the U.S.

Cost

According to a preliminary estimate of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the net budgetary effect of enactment of H.R. 2608 would be to save \$11 million over 5 years and save \$48 million over 10 years. These savings come from the reduction in tax refunds for individuals who have fraudulently claimed unemployment benefits, which is included in the bill as an offset to cover the cost of this extension.

Staff Contact

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